

The Spirited Nature

UNCATEGORIZED

REPORT THIS AD

The Two Romans We Know Went in the Holy of Holies

Posted by THE JONES on AUGUST 25, 2019

Today, my pastor preached on the Tabernacle from Exodus. It reminded me of something else I had been reading, and then things clicked. I remembered that there were two people in history outside of the Bible who had entered the Holy of Holies. I went back home, and this is what I wrote.

It is Exodus where God sets forth his rules for approaching his presence in the Tabernacle. These rules are caveated many times with the warning that if they are not followed, the person will “bear guilt and die.” In this theme, there are several men in the Bible who run into trouble by not following God’s commands about approaching him.

The first two are Nadab and Abihu. They were the sons of Aaron. This is what happened in Leviticus 10 1-3:

Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it and laid incense on it and offered unauthorized fire before the Lord, which he had not commanded them. And fire came out from before the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord. Then Moses said to Aaron, “This is what the Lord has said: ‘Among those who are near me I will be sanctified, and before all the people I will be glorified.’” And Aaron held his peace.

In 1 Samuel, the Ark of the Covenant is captured, and a whole host of Philistines meet a terrible fate, including the idol Dagon. After the Ark of the Covenant is placed in front of the idol, 1 Samuel 5, recounts how the idol was found in the morning with its head and hands

cut off.

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Two other individuals get in trouble with the presence of God in the Bible. The first is in 2 Samuel 6:5 when the Ark is being transported on a wagon cart. The oxen trip, and a man named Uzzah touches the Ark to steady it. He immediately dies.

The second individual is the King of Judah, King Uzziah in 2 Chronicles 26. He tries to offer sacrifices before the temple as a king. But the priests stop him from doing so. While holding the censor for burning incense, leprosy breaks out on his forehead in front of the priests. They rush him out, and he lives as a leper until his death.

Now these stories sound very “biblical.” But I remembered two other people in history actually going INTO the Holy of Holies. I’m writing a book, and a part of that book required me to do a great deal of reading of Josephus and Roman history just before the time of Herod the Great. We have reliable history which says two people entered the Temple and the Holy of Holies: Gnaeus Pompey Magnus (“Pompey”) and Marcus Licinius Crassus.

I remembered these guys, and started to think about what happened to them after they went in. Did they die immediately? No. But their lives do not exactly disprove the pattern we see in the Bible.

The History

The reliable history actually doesn’t come from Christian sources. Instead, they are from:

- Josephus (Jewish, who lived from 37AD to 100AD,
- Plutarch (Roman/Greek, lived 46AD -120AD), and
- Cassius Dio (Roman, lived 155AD – 235AD).

Though Josephus was a Jew, none were Christian. Josephus records the entrance but it is the Roman historians who tell us what happened afterwards.

Though they did not die immediately, their deaths create quite a prophetic metaphor.

Pompey Enters the Temple and Holy of Holies

The first Roman to enter the Holy of Holies was Pompey. He was one of the greatest generals of the Roman Republic. He was also a member of the First Triumvirate of Rome. In other words, he was super-famous and super-powerful.

The occasion of his being in Jerusalem was a brief civil war in Judea between two royals of the Hasmonean dynasty (three kings that ruled Judea after the revolt of the Maccabees). The warring parties were Hyrcanus (who was supported by Antipater, the father of Herod the Great) and his younger brother Aristobulus.

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Hyrcanus was supported by the Sadducees and Aristobulus was supported by the Pharisees (who Josephus also talks about in both *Antiquities* and *Jewish Wars*). In that Jewish civil war, both sides sought the support of Rome's military might to secure the dual offices of King and High Priest. When Pompey was in the Roman province of Syria, Aristobulus promised a payment to Pompey, but did not pay. So Pompey marched on Jerusalem and captured it. With Antipater's help (and money), Hyrcanus was named High Priest by Pompey, but not king.

Josephus tells us in *Antiquities*, book 14 chapter 4, that after taking Jerusalem, Pompey entered the Holy of Holies:

For Pompey went into [the inaccessible parts of the Temple], and not a few of those that were with him also; and saw all that which it was unlawful for any other men to see, but only for the High Priests. There were in that temple the golden table; the holy candlestick; and the pouring vessels; and a great quantity of spices: and besides these there were among the treasures, two thousand talents of sacred money. Yet did Pompey touch nothing of all this; on account of his regard to religion; and in this point also he acted in a manner that was worthy of his virtue. The next day he gave order to those that had the charge of the temple to cleanse it, and to bring what offerings the law required to God, and restored the High Priesthood to Hyrcanus

This happened in or around 63 BC.

Crassus Plunders the Temple and All of its Gold

The next person to enter was Crassus. He was known as the "Richest man in Rome." He also became a member of the First Triumvirate. According to Plutarch (in *Parallel Lives*, "the Life of Crassus"), Crassus was off to fight an unprovoked war against the Parthians because of his greed and envy at the success of his Roman peers. In anticipation of this war, he invaded Judea from Syria. He began plundering, and eventually, he captured Jerusalem and entered the Temple.

In Antiquities book 14, chapter 7, Josephus tells how he this happened:

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Now Crassus, as he was going upon his expedition against the Parthians, came into

*Judea; and carried off the money that was in the temple, which Pompey had left: being two thousand talents: and was disposed to spoil it of all the gold belonging to it, which was eight thousand talents. **He also took a beam which was made of solid beaten gold**, of the weight of three hundred minæ: each of which weighed two pounds and an half. **It was the priest who was guardian of the sacred treasures**, and whose name was Eleazar, that gave him this beam: not out of a wicked design: for he was a good and a righteous man: but being intrusted with the custody of the veils belonging to the temple, which were of admirable beauty, and of very costly workmanship, and hung down from this beam, when he saw that Crassus was busy in gathering money, and was in fear for the intire ornaments of the temple, **he gave him this beam of gold, as a ransom for the whole**: but this not till he had given his oath that he would remove nothing else out of the temple, but be satisfied with this only which he should give him, being worth many ten thousand [shekels.] Now this beam was contained in a wooden beam that was hollow: but was known to no others, but Eleazar alone knew it. **Yet did Crassus take away this beam, upon the condition of touching nothing else that belonged to the temple; and then brake his oath, and carried away all the gold that was in the temple.***

While Pompey went in, saw what should not be seen, and left all the gold because of his “regard for religion,” acting “in a manner that was worthy of his virtue,” Crassus was different. He pillaged all of Jerusalem. When he was offered a hollow rod of wood filled with gold, he both took the beam, and everything else, too.

I’m fairly confident that this beam was the one that likely separated the Temple from the Holy of Holies, because it is described very similarly to how Exodus 25 commands Moses to make it. The veil was removed before Crassus, and he instead took “all the gold that was in the temple,” which included — from the previous chapter on Pompey’s trespass in the Temple — “the golden table, the holy candlestick; and the pouring vessels.”

These are items described to be inside the Temple and the Holy of Holies.

The Ensuing Divine Retribution (Or at Least Poetic Justice)

I know only of these two occurrences where non-priests enter the Holy of Holies (before the

destruction of the Temple in 70AD). There may be more, but I don't know of them. Though Josephus recorded the event. It's Roman history what came afterwards.

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What is truly amazing is what happens next.

Fate of Pompey

Pompey did not die immediately. In fact, he was and remained very wealthy and very popular. Plutarch, Appian, and Cassius Dio tell what happened to him after he left his conquests in East, which included his foray into Judea, and arrived back in Italy.

He was well respected and quite humble. He served as Consul in both 55 and 52 BC, for the second and third time. He was at the top of the Roman nobility and government. Though he was more successful in life than any other Roman general before him, he took no grand titles, only the moniker “Magnus,” meaning “the Great.” There were three triumphs given in his honor — the highest Roman award and recognition for a conquest. Each of these conquests was on a different continent — making it quite a unique hat trick. Not only typical spoils of war were displayed, but astonishing artifacts, including the supposed cloak of Alexander the Great, which he wore in the procession. He was loved by the people of Rome, respected by the nobility in Rome, and feared by his political opponents, as well.

He formed the “triumvirate” with Julius Caesar and Crassus to truly control politics in the Republic. After being widowed and then divorced, he had a strategic marriage to the daughter to Julius Caesar — Julia.

But unfortunately, his success would not last.

Civil War

First, Crassus died which will be discussed below. With Crassus's death, the balance of power in the Triumvirate switched into a rivalry between himself and Julius Caesar. When the security of his alliance with Julius Caesar — his wife Julia — died in childbirth along with his offspring, the relationship truly soured. Soon, Julius Caesar would begin the Roman Civil War in 49 BC by crossing the Rubicon. In the face of this army, the Senate and Pompey fled to Greece and established a foothold. It was Pompey who served as the military general and primary political opponent of Caesar.

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But despite his military success in the past, despite fighting with better provisions and more soldiers, and despite no real mistakes on his part in the ensuing campaign, Julius Caesar would overcome him. Pompey and the army of the Senate were defeated in the battle of Pharsalus in 48 BC in Greece. Caesar won the Civil War.

The Death of Pompey

Pompey was able to flee, and left Roman territory to Egypt, where he had favors to cash in, because of his loans and support which allowed the Egyptian King to obtain and keep his throne. Pompey hoped to cash in on those favors. He disembarked from his boat, and put himself into a small dinghy piloted by the servants of the Egyptian royal administration. But instead of safety, he was murdered by the Egyptians, strangled and stabbed. He then was beheaded, and the head of Pompey was delivered to Julius Caesar.

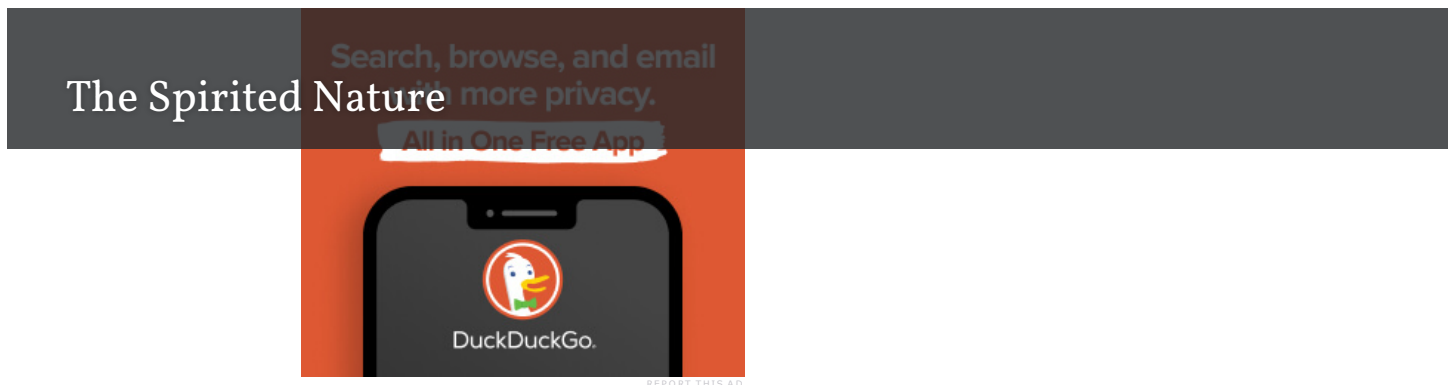
The Roman historian Cassius Dio in book 42, chapter 5, parts 1-5 sums up the death of Pompey in this way:

Such was the end of Pompey the Great, whereby was proved once more the weakness and the strange fortune of the human race. For, although he was not at all deficient in foresight, but had always been absolutely secure against any force able to do him harm, yet he was deceived; and although he had won many unexpected victories in Africa, and many, too, in Asia and Europe, both by land and sea, ever since boyhood, yet now in his fifty-eighth year he was defeated without apparent reason. Although he had subdued the entire Roman sea, he perished on it; and although he had once been, as the saying is, “master of a thousand ships,” he was destroyed in a tiny boat near Egypt and in a sense by Ptolemy, whose father he had once restored from exile to that land and to his kingdom.

Fate of Crassus

After pillaging Judea and Jerusalem and the Temple, Crassus went on his war against the Parthians. He and his entire army were crushed by the Parthians in 53 BC in the battle of Carrhae. [See a description of this battle here.](#)

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Plutarch gives great detail in his Parallel Lives, Life of Crassus. In an ill-advised and ill-planned campaign, Crassus marched off into the desert with his army of infantry. He did not stop for water, and instead foolishly chose to pursue horsemen into the desert. Then he then found himself surrounded by a Parthian army of horsemen. This battle was one of the worst defeats in Roman history, and **it was truly hellish, and I mean that as literally as possible.**

The battle description sounds like a scene out of Dante's Inferno. After the Roman army goes into the desert, they find themselves face-to-face with a somewhat small group of Parthian cavalry. We are told "they appeared to be neither numerous nor formidable." But then,

*But when they were near the Romans and the signal was raised by their commander, first of all they filled the plain with the sound of a deep and terrifying roar. . . . **While the Romans were in consternation at this din, suddenly their enemies dropped the coverings of their armour, and were seen to be themselves blazing in helmets and breastplates, their Margianian steel glittering keen and bright, and their horses clad in plates of bronze and steel.** And when Crassus ordered his light-armed troops to make a charge, they did not advance far, but **encountering a multitude of arrows, abandoned their undertaking and ran back for shelter among the men-at-arms, among whom they caused the beginning of disorder and fear, for these now saw the velocity and force of the arrows, which fractured armour, and tore their way through every covering alike, whether hard or soft.***

But the Parthians now stood at long intervals from one another and began to shoot their arrows from all sides at once, not with any accurate aim (for the dense formation of the Romans would not suffer an archer to miss even if he wished it), but making vigorous and powerful shots from bows which were large and mighty and curved so as to discharge their missiles with great force. At once, then, the plight of the Romans was a grievous one; for if they kept their ranks, they were wounded in great numbers, and if they tried to come to close quarters with the enemy, they were just as far from effecting anything and suffered just as much.

Though Romans ordinarily waited until archers ran out of arrows before engaging, Crassus and the Romans noticed that camels with a multitude of ammunition followed the horse archers. They were truly in trouble.

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Crassus entered this trap by his own folly. To break out, he ordered an advance led by Publius — his son and a commander of the cavalry. In the face of this advance of 6,000, the Parthians seemed to fall back, and Publius and the horsemen, archers, and infantry followed. But it was a feint:

after they had gone forward a long distance, they perceived the ruse. For the seeming fugitives wheeled about and were joined at the same time by others more numerous still. Then the Romans halted, supposing that the enemy would come to close quarters with them, since they were so few in number. But the Parthians stationed their mail-clad horsemen in front of the Romans, and then with the rest of their cavalry in loose array rode round them, tearing up the surface of the ground, and raising from the depths great heaps of sand which fell in limitless showers of dust, so that the Romans could neither see clearly nor speak plainly, but, being crowded into a narrow compass and falling upon one another, were shot, and died no easy nor even speedy death. For, in the agonies of convulsive pain, and writhing about the arrows, they would break them off in their wounds, and then in trying to pull out by force the barbed heads which had pierced their veins and sinews, they tore and disfigured themselves the more.

How bad were these arrows? The effect is described this way:

[W]hen Publius urged them to charge the enemy's mail-clad horsemen, they showed him that their hands were riveted to their shields and their feet nailed through and through to the ground, so that they were helpless either for flight or for self-defense.

Crassus knew of this danger, but he could do nothing, because of his own weak spirit:

[N]ow Crassus was a prey to many conflicting emotions, and no longer looked at anything with calm judgement. His fear for the whole army drove him to refuse, and at the same time his yearning love for his son impelled him to grant assistance; but at last he began to move his forces forward.

We are told that there were two Greeks with Publius who tried to get him to safety at a

nearby town when he was surrounded away from the main Roman force:

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*But Publius, declaring that no death could have such terrors for him as to make him desert those who were perishing on his account, ordered them to save their own lives, bade them farewell, and dismissed them. **Then he himself, being unable to use his hand, which had been pierced through with an arrow,** presented his side to his shield-bearer and ordered him to strike home with his sword.*

Publius died in that battle. We are told how this group perished:

*The survivors fought on until the Parthians mounted the hill and **transfixed [impaled]** them with their long spears, and they say that not more than **five hundred** were taken alive. Then the Parthians cut off the head of Publius, and rode off at once to attack Crassus.*

So:

- The entire company of the son is nailed to their shields and the ground by the arrows of their enemies.
- Publius himself was pierced in the hand with an arrow
- The primary means of death was being impaled by a spear.
- The number of Romans who lived to pass on this information was “not more than five hundred.”
- The men were parched and unable to speak or see or move or breath.

Plutarch continues with what happened after Publius's death:

*At this point, however, the enemy came up with clamour and battle cries which made them more fearful than ever, and again many of their drums began bellowing about the Romans, who awaited the beginning of a second battle. Besides, **those of the enemy who carried the head of Publius fixed high upon a spear, rode close up and displayed it, scornfully asking after his parents and family, for surely, they said, it was not meet that Crassus, most base and cowardly of men, should be the father of a son so noble and of such splendid valour.** This spectacle shattered and unstrung the spirits of the Romans more than all the rest of their terrible experiences, and they were all filled, not with a passion for revenge, as was to have been expected, but with shuddering and trembling.*

After enduring this until nightfall, the Romans left their camp where it was (a big deal for a Roman army) and hastily retreated to a fortified town. They left their wounded who could

not keep up behind; and those wounded were killed by the Parthians. The Parthians then surrounded that town, and Crassus was forced (half by the Parthians and half by his own men) to come out and surrender.

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At this point, Crassus was subjected to a very odd spectacle in the surrender, in which the Parthians mocked his great wealth (which even Romans acknowledge he gained by force and underhanded ways) by making him mount a horse with gold-studded bridle. Parthians beside it whipped the horse to make it gallop faster and faster with Crassus holding on for dear life. Eventually, the Romans nearby couldn't take the insult, and they tried to rescue him, killing some Parthians engaged in the spectacle. But they could not rescue him. Instead, **he was beheaded and his right hand was cut off by the Parthians as he lay in the dirt.**

Finally, according to the Plutarch, even though the Parthian General had killed Crassus, he sent a word back to the Parthian cities that he had captured Crassus alive. But it was only a lie for effect. The general ordered:

*That one of his captives **who bore the greatest likeness to Crassus, Caius Paccianus, put on a woman's royal robe, and under instructions to answer to the name of Crassus and the title of Imperator when so addressed, was conducted along on horseback.** Before him rode trumpeters and a few lictors borne on camels; from the fasces of the lictors purses were suspended, and to their axes were fastened Roman heads newly cut off; behind these followed courtezans of Seleucia, musicians, who sang many scurrilous and ridiculous songs about the effeminacy and cowardice of Crassus; and these things were for all to see.*

That happened about one year after he plundered the Temple and passed unauthorized into the Holy of Holies.

The Biblical Parallels

On the one hand, this is just ordinary history. But on the other hand, there are all kinds of surprising metaphors passed on to us by non-Christian and non-Jewish historians.

Pompey

Let's start with Pompey. The Death of Pompey rings out like a real-life demonstration of Romans 9:17: "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth."

That verse is about the Pharaoh in Exodus, and Pompey is not a Pharaoh. However, he did basically MAKE the king of Egypt King. And of all the places for Pompey might have died, Egypt is not the first anyone would have guessed — least of all Pompey, because he went there voluntarily.

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Remember that again and again in the Bible, God repeats throughout the Old Testament that He is “the Lord your God who **brought you out of Egypt.**” And here is Pompey — with all his power, respect, “virtue” and “honor” and “foresight” — coming to his final ruin by **going into Egypt.**

In 63 BC, he tramples the command of God in his ignorance. Though he was able to gain power and wealth and prestige, nothing he built prospered. Though he effectively “ruled” the world (and Egypt), he found himself weak and helpless. He brought himself INTO to Egypt (or “the world”), and died a small and inglorious death.

Though he has no brash injustices against the Temple or God, he is not at all saved by his virtues. He enters the temple and sees what he wants to see out of a presumptuous spirit. He then instructs the priests to cleanse the temple to cover what he knows to be a desecration of the Temple with whatever sacrifice they need for the occasion.

But as God says in 1 Samuel 15:22-23:

*Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices,
as in obeying the voice of the Lord?
Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice,
and to listen than the fat of rams.
For rebellion is as the sin of divination,
and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry.*

Though Pompey he lived for around 15 years after he entered the Temple, his life afterward crumbled into a picture of “the strange fortune of the human race.”

All his works fell short. His sacrifices were of no use. He fled to Egypt for safety, and the King of Egypt killed him. Though he had “regard for religion,” he knew nothing of the Lord. He did not follow his commandments, and had no repentance in his trespasses.

He dies in a small and ignoble manner, with his body beheaded, like the idol of Dagon that stood in the presence of the Ark of God.

Crassus

Crassus's death is even richer in metaphors, far more direct than Pompey, as his brazenness was greater than Pompey's. For instance, being with the plunder of the Temple:

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When Eleazar the priest saw that Crassus was plundering Jerusalem, he attempted to save the treasure of the Temple by ransoming part for the whole. He wanted a deal with Crassus.

The priest offered him the wooden bar that held up the ornate “veil” of the temple, which in all likelihood is the one that is described in Exodus 26. This divided the Holy place from the Holy of Holies. Since Crassus took that bar, it means **he removed the veil that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies**. This is the same veil that was torn at the death of Christ, when his death made intercession for all people. Crassus therefore similarly removed the veil from the top.

But rather than making intercession, as Jesus did, Crassus deceived Eleazar, and plundered all the gold in the Temple. When he came into the Holy of Holies (which either he or his men must have done), he came before the Lord in the Holy of Holies as if he were a High Priest. But in plundering the items of the Temple, he treated himself much superior to any a High Priest. He came as conqueror.

But we are told in Hebrews 7 that Christ, like Melchizedek, is both priest and King — not Crassus. By entering in the way he did, Crassus defamed and ran roughshod over the law of God.

Despite entering like a perverse Christ at the head of a Roman army, within the year Crassus was dead.

Just as Crassus lied to the priest and plundered the gold of the Temple, the Parthians lied to Crassus in his surrender, and they mocked his great wealth, they took his life, they cut off his right hand, and severed his head from his body as he lay on the ground. His head and hand were cut off, just like Dagon in 1 Samuel 8.

Even more parallels in his death show a poetic justice that this false “King and High Priest,” who came into the presence of God had as it relates to Jesus Christ, the only true King and High Priest is Christ:

- Crassus took down the veil, and plundered the Temple for himself.
 - Christ tore down the veil and opened the presence of God to all men.
- Crassus marched into the desert. He was surrounded by enemies.
 - Meanwhile, Christ in the gospels goes to the wilderness, he was tempted by Satan.
- Crassus is a Roman, and they are primarily infantry. They chased a mounted enemy that seemed small in number, but suddenly they revealed “blazing in helmets and

breastplates, their Margianian steel glittering keen and bright, and their horses clad in plates of bronze and steel.”

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- Meanwhile, in Revelation 19, Christ is shown in his power as riding a white horse, and his name is “faithful and true.” He is followed by “the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses.”
- Plutarch makes it clear that the Parthians in their battle cries did not go forth with trumpets, but instead beat drums.
 - Meanwhile, in Revelation, trumpets are the main heralds of the host of heaven. The saving virtue of this scene is quite the opposite of what we see in the Parthians.
- Crassus orders his Son to attack the Parthian enemy, and his son dies following this command.
 - God the father orders his son to give his life as a ransom for many, and he dies following this command.
- The Son of Crassus at his death was accompanied by people who urge him to save himself.
 - The Son of God was urged by those around him to save himself, as he had saved others.
- The Son of Crassus was pierced in his hand with an arrow. His army was nailed to the ground and their hands were riveted to their shields with the arrows.
 - The Son of God was pierced in his hands and his feet. He was nailed to a cross.
- Crassus the father of Publius in his command was “prey to many conflicting emotions, and no longer looked at anything with calm judgement.”
 - God the Father of Jesus Christ “predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, . . . in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.”
- The Son of Crassus was impaled by the lances of the Parthians in his death after being pierced with arrow like nails.
 - The Son of God was pierced in his side with a spear after being nailed to the cross.
- The army of Crassus was parched and in thirst.
 - Jesus Christ was parched in his death and on the Cross said “I thirst.” He also gives those who follow him “living water.”
- The son of Crassus was beheaded and then placed on the end of a spear.
 - The Son of God was hung from a cross.
- The numbers of soldiers who survived and could bear witness to the death of the Son of Crassus was “not more than five hundred.”
 - In 1 Corinthians, Paul numbers the amount of people who can bear witness of the

resurrection of Jesus at “more than five hundred.”

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After Crassus died, he was presented as alive in a mockery of his name, and the failure of his expedition, and called *Imperator* meaning “victorious general” in the defeat.

- After Christ died, he was raised to the glory of his name, and he is (among other things) “Christus Victor” in his death.

Conclusion:

God is true to his word when he warns about approaching him. These events took place when the law of Moses commanded that all who come before him must be purified “when they come near the altar to minister in the Holy Place, lest they bear guilt and die.”

But Pompey and Crassus did not do so. Therefore, as it says in Hebrews 10:30-31:

... “*Vengeance is mine; I will repay.*” And again, “*The Lord will judge his people.*”

It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

And Galatians 6:7:

“*Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.*”

But in the new covenant, God’s Spirit has been poured out on all men. We come before the Lord as unrighteous, as self-justified as Pompey or as Brazen as Crassus. We fall woefully short. But we have an advocate and high priest, we can come before the throne of God without fear.

And I love these stories. They are especially remarkable because THEY ARE NOT CHRISTIAN HISTORIES.

But there they are, sitting there for the world to see.

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